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## Courage and Combat Care: Bronze Star with Combat V presented to Naval Hospital Bremerton Hospital Corpsman

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By Douglas H. Stutz | Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs

Running 300 meters, just under the length of a flight deck, is one thing. Legging that distance out across improvised explosive device (IED) laden ground as a target for small arms fire to save the life of a severely wounded soldier is quite another.

That's exactly what a hospital corpsman on deployment to Afghanistan did July 19, 2011.

Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Michael Marchante, currently assigned to Naval Hospital Bremerton, was involved in combat operations searching for enemy locations when a soldier from the Republic of Georgia stepped on an IED in a wadi (dry streambed) in southern Helmand Province. Marchante immediately ran to save the life of the badly wounded platoon commander. He promptly applied tourniquets and pressure dressings to staunch the rapid blood loss while coming under heavy enemy gun fire. With the bullets flying all around, he shielded the casualty with his own body and continued to provide life-saving medical care.

For his actions on that day, Marchante was recognized with the Bronze Star medal with Combat Distinguishing Device at an award ceremony at NHB Oct. 25.



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*"It was just something that came naturally. As soon as I heard the blast, my training kicked in and I ran to provide medical care. I was the only corpsman there, and that's what we do," said Marchante, understating the surrounding dangers of his involvement.*

"What he did doesn't surprise me at all. He's a very humble, hard-working and reliable corpsman," commented Chief Hospital Corpsman Philip Nacionales, director for Nursing Services, leading chief petty officer.

The day began with Marchante, a Murrieta, Calif. native, part of a mounted Marine patrol from Patrol Base Didgori that linked up with the other coalition forces to participate searching a specific area that was known to provide the enemy with firing positions. After Marchante's group established a western vantage point in the area in question, they soon came under sustained small arms fire.



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Meanwhile, elements of the 33rd Georgian Light Infantry Battalion were actively sweeping for reported IEDs in the area. The soldiers were moving back to their vehicles when the scout platoon commander stepped on a pressure-plate IED. The subsequent blast hurled him into the air, amputated his right leg, and peppered his other lower extremities with shrapnel.

Marchante immediately grabbed his medical kit bag and followed his team leader and two Marine explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians as they quickly swept a safe path through the threat of secondary and tertiary IEDs to the wounded soldier. Once Marchante reached the severely wounded Georgian, he immediately came under small arms and heavy machine gun fire.

Witnesses note that the volume of fire was heavy for the first two to three minutes with rounds landing within inches of Marchante as he focused his complete attention on saving the life of the soldier in front of him. Without regard for his own safety, Marchante instinctively used his body to shield the

casualty. While initially positioned at the foot of the casualty, he then pivoted, exposing his back to enemy fire while he knelt over the casualty to continue to provide protection as he rendered the needed critical care. As the enemy fire continued, other coalition personnel went prone to avoid it, but Marchante remained in his kneeling position to continue to provide vital emergency care.

He applied tourniquets to both legs and several pressure dressings to stop the heavy blood loss. After the Marines positioned a Mine-Resistant, Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle to shield the casualty and Marchante, that ended the incoming gunfire threat. By that time, the bleeding had stopped and Marchante assisted in loading the casualty into the vehicle which was then used to transport to a hastily-setup helicopter landing zone. Marchante continued to provide medical aid in the MRAP and up to the point the casualty was handed off to the crew of the Medical Evacuation helicopter.

Throughout Marchante's deployment, his medical assistance was officially documented to be directly responsible for preserving the lives of 14 Georgian soldiers. The summary of action on his award for the Bronze Star asserts that 'his courage under fire, his care for his fellow man, and his proficiency as a corpsman were inspiring to witness. For the impact he made on the 33rd Georgian Light Infantry Battalion and his heroic actions on July 19 in which he prioritized the care of a wounded coalition partner above his own personal safety,' he was recommended for the Bronze star with Combat Distinguishing Device.

"The Marines I deployed with, Army medics and other corpsman in Afghanistan and elsewhere...this is what we do. I didn't think I did anything special, except my job. When I transferred from Camp Pendleton to here, I was told about being put in for an award, but I didn't think much about it. It's very humbling and overwhelming. I wear this medal for all the corpsmen," Marchante said, at the time attached to Supporting Arms Liaison Team Delta, 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, Headquarters Group (Forward), 11 Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) from May 15, 2011 to Dec. 4, 2011, with the mission to provide support to a few isolated patrol bases manned by soldiers of the Republic of Georgia.

"Marchante displayed courage in the face of the enemy while under fire, and his actions undoubtedly saved the life of the scout platoon commander that day," stated U.S. Marine Corps Capt. S.A. Stewart, team leader, who witnesses the actions.

Staff Sgt. L.J. Mathews, team leader for the Marine EOD response unit, noted that Marchante consistently exposed

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himself to enemy fire in order to provide medical assistance to the casualty.

"His decisive actions saved the life the Georgian scout platoon commander and are deserving of recognition for valor," affirmed Mathews.

Overall during that time, Marchante conducted over 100 combat patrols and 50 convoys in support of the 33rd and 31st Georgian Light Infantry Battalion. He established himself as the most knowledgeable medical provider for more than 400 Marines, Georgian soldiers, Afghan National Army soldiers and Afghan interpreters.

Along with being continually sought out to provide medical care ranging from scorpion stings to gastrointestinal concerns, Marchante also mentored and tutored the Georgian medics. He also rendered medical care to local nationals, including treating one child suffering from an open fracture. Because of that care and compassion, he helped strengthen the relationship between the Georgian soldiers and the local residents, considered one small victory in the difficult counterinsurgency fight.

As were his efforts on July 19, 2011.



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